Robotics Team Wraps a Banner Year

It was quite a year for The Preuss School UCSD’s Midnight Mechanics. The robotics team was recognized at the Central Valley Regional with the prestigious Chairman’s Award—given to the team that best represents a model for others to emulate—which earned the team a chance to compete at the FIRST Championship in St. Louis. Thanks to generous individuals and corporate sponsors, including General Motors, Leidos, TE Connectivity, Qualcomm, Brain Corporation and ViaSat, the team was able to raise enough money to take 27 students to the competition.

Although the team did not advance to the elimination rounds, the students gained valuable experience from the competition. “A trip like this was a real eye-opener for our students,” said Dan Rupert, The Preuss School robotics coach. “Special thanks to everyone who helped give the kids this rare opportunity.”

The Preuss School Graduates Look to a Bright Future

“How far are you going to go?” It was the question posed to The Preuss School UCSD Class of 2016 by this year’s special commencement speaker, Leonard Comma, chairman of the board and CEO of Jack in the Box Inc. Judging by the accomplishments of the 132 seniors Comma was addressing, the answer is far, really far.

This year’s class boasted four Gates Millennium Scholars: recipients of prestigious scholarships that cover all college costs for undergraduate and graduate education. In the past 13 years, The Preuss School has had 39 Gates Millennium Scholars.

“Considering only 1,000 of these scholarships are awarded each year, this is no small feat,” said Principal Scott Barton. “We are extremely proud of our Gates Millennium Scholars and all our graduates. Their success is a testament to their determination and many hours of hard work.”

Indeed, it is. Of the graduates, 111 have been accepted to a four-year college or university. A few are heading off to private universities such as Syracuse University, the University of Southern California and Pitzer College. The majority will attend public universities, with 59 planning to attend a University of California campus, including 27 students who will attend UC San Diego on a full ride as Chancellor’s Associates Scholars. Another 34 are headed to a California State University campus. Thirty students will attend community colleges with plans to transfer to a four-year university.

This year’s graduating class also garnered more than $2.2 million in award money. In addition to the Gates Millennium Scholarships and Chancellor’s Associates Scholarships, students received the Preuss Alumni Legacy Scholarship and Grillo-Marxuach Scholarship, as well as scholarships from the Carrera-Joffe Foundation, Kiwanis of La Jolla, and the Patricia and Christopher Weil Family Foundation, to name just a few.

Congratulations to the Class of 2016!
New Scholarship Honors Memory of Devoted Scientist, Mentor

Her love of science was infectious. As a student, Kerri Mowen, Ph.D., excelled not because she wanted to earn a perfect score, but because she had a hunger to learn. As a professional developing drugs to treat autoimmune diseases, she was committed to sharing her passion by mentoring the next generation of young scientists.

“Kerri was a very involved and caring mentor,” said Laura Rivard, a close friend of Mowen. “She often hosted young visitors in her lab who were treated to hands-on experiences. She even organized special events like the Mowen Lab Hunger Games.”

To honor her memory and support students with an interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), a new scholarship has been established at The Preuss School UCSD. Mowen’s family and friends raised funds to create an endowed award that will provide one $1,500 scholarship to a graduating senior from The Preuss School each spring in perpetuity. This year, UC San Diego-bound senior Kelly Dang received the inaugural award.

Mowen studied biology at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, before attending graduate school at UC San Diego and completing postdoctoral studies at Harvard University. She worked at The Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla before co-founding Padlock Therapeutics to translate discoveries into treatments.
Graduation is always a bitter-sweet moment: the celebration of an ending and a beginning, a time when we look back with pride on all that our students have accomplished and look ahead with anticipation of the achievements yet to come.

It is also a time when we recognize some of the people who help our students succeed. The Spirit of Preuss Community Award is given annually to those who embody the “spirit of Preuss”—people with strong character and values who are dedicated to the school and serve as role models to others. This year, we are pleased to recognize a local fundraising organization as one of our awardees. Since its inception in 1946, Las Patronas has donated more than $17 million to more than 1,000 charitable institutions in San Diego, including The Preuss School UCSD. With its support, we were able to purchase a 10-passenger van for students to attend athletic matches, arts events and other community activities.

We are also happy to recognize three individuals this year:

- Brian Luscomb, a longtime champion of the school and a key liaison between The Preuss School and Jack in the Box, where he works as deputy vice president of corporate communications.
- Felix Campos, our grounds supervisor here at The Preuss School who has worked many long hours to keep our campus beautiful and our students and staff safe.
- Russell King, a UC San Diego employee who is always looking for ways to support The Preuss School, whether it’s speaking to classes, offering internships, hosting lunches and much more.

Thank you to all our Spirit of Preuss award winners and to everyone else who is helping to make a difference in the lives of our students. Together, we are ensuring a bright future for all.

Best regards,
Scott Barton
Principal

Monika Langarica’s parents always believed she was special. As she grew up in southeast San Diego, however, the pathway to success was not drawn out for her. It wasn’t until she was accepted to The Preuss School UCSD, with the help of her fifth-grade teacher, that opportunity coincided with ability.

“I was not born into magical circumstances that facilitated my matriculation,” Langarica said. “People like me require communities to make it. Preuss was a part of the village that gave me access to just outcomes.”

She is a self-proclaimed workaholic, yet Langarica credits her success to her family, teachers and community. She acknowledges the sacrifices of her parents, who immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico and worked multiple jobs to make ends meet. She also recognizes the support of her teachers at The Preuss School, who helped her pass eight Advanced Placement exams, land her first job, apply for college and discover advocacy.

“My mom woke up before sunrise to take me to the bus stop so I would make it to school before she started her 12-hour workdays,” Langarica said.

After graduating from The Preuss School in 2007, Langarica went on to the University of Southern California, where she was a Gates Millennium Scholar and graduated cum laude. She went on to earn a law degree at UC Berkeley and now serves as a nonprofit immigration lawyer.

“I have over 100 highly needy clients who, without my work, would not have access to legal services,” Langarica said. “I am investing in creating a more just world for the population I serve, just like those in my life mitigated the barriers that were made to limit my outcomes.”
What does an engineer’s laboratory look like? How can I achieve a career in this field? The Preuss School UCSD students enrolled in pre-engineering and robotics classes recently had the chance to visit Qualcomm Inc. and hear from experts firsthand about what the profession entails.

The new partnership was initiated by Qualcomm Vice President of Engineering Charles Bergan, a UC San Diego alumnus (B.S. ’87, M.S. ’88) and member of the UC San Diego Alumni Board of Directors. The goal of the program is to promote interest in the field as well as assure students that engineering is a viable career path for them.

“It is inspiring to watch Preuss create a bridge between a student’s uncertain past and their bright, college-bound future,” Bergan said. “Qualcomm is proud to play a part in helping Preuss’ students explore their passion for engineering.”

Throughout the year, current and retired Qualcomm employees also connect with robotics team students as they build their devices for competition.